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SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR OURISMAN TALKS CRIME, "ALBA," CULTURE  
WITH SVG PM

REF: A) 07 BRIDGETOWN 1341

Classified By: PolOff Arend Zwartjes for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: In a wide-ranging discussion over breakfast, Ambassador Ourisman and St. Vincent and the Grenadines Prime Minister Ralph Gonsalves covered the crime situation in St. Vincent, the Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas (ALBA), the state of the region's primary air carrier (LIAT), the IMF's involvement in the Eastern Caribbean, and cultural influences and preservation. PM Gonsalves reiterated SVG's gratitude for American military and law enforcement assistance, and offered to investigate the handling of a court case involving a Peace Corps Volunteer who had been stabbed mid-2007. End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) On January 29, 2008 Ambassador Ourisman hosted St. Vincent and the Grenadines Prime Minister Ralph Gonsalves for breakfast at the Embassy before his first official meeting with new Barbados Prime Minister David Thompson. Initially meant to focus on the recent trial involving a Peace Corps Volunteer (PCV) who was stabbed in St. Vincent last year, the discussion soon wandered to cover a variety of issues.

"Daniel, My Brother"

¶3. (C) Much of the discussion focused on Gonsalves' participation in the sixth Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas (ALBA) summit just days before in Caracas (septel). Gonsalves was quick to deny any military and intelligence agenda or component to ALBA, and appeared to generally want to disassociate himself from Chavez's ideologies. He was quick to thank the United States for its continued military and law enforcement assistance. Gonsalves opined that Nicaragua's Ortega (who he described as his "brother") is "less strident" this time around, and noted that Chavez and Ortega plan to visit St. Vincent, Dominica, and Antigua in late February.

Barbados Elections

¶4. (C) On the subject of Barbados' newly elected government, Gonsalves stated that he did not expect any significant differences in the ruling Democratic Labour Party's policies, as both major political parties in Barbados are "steeped in social democracy and committed to regional integration." Echoing Grenada PM Keith Mitchell's comments in the press,

Gonsalves dismissed the notion of "winds of change" sweeping through the Caribbean with the recent change of governments in Jamaica, St. Lucia, Bahamas, and Barbados. According to Gonsalves, Barbados' two main parties are so similar that "differences will have to be manufactured to keep the party faithful happy."

#### Investment, Macroeconomics, and the IMF

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15. (C) The Ambassador then mentioned USAID's recent support for Investment Promotion Authorities (IPA's) in St. Kitts and Antigua, and asked Gonsalves if SVG had interest in forming an IPA as well. Gonsalves replied that while St. Vincent currently has a type of investment authority now (the National Investment Promotion, Inc.), he conceded that it needed modernizing and expressed interest in partnering with the United States to pursue an IPA. Expanding on the theme of economics, Gonsalves noted that SVG farmers had "taken a beating" as a result of the loss of European trade preferences. He noted that SVG had begun importing sugar and using the profits from selling the sugar to the private sector to subsidize agricultural inputs.

16. (C) Gonsalves emphasized that while SVG currently receives good marks from the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the organization is not generally constructed to understand the "peculiarities" of small island economies. Saying "you cannot use general economic theories" with countries such as SVG, Gonsalves cited his use of "counter-cycle fiscal policy", which the IMF originally opposed, and then later praised but added that it should be discontinued. Speaking philosophically, the PM noted that "the peoples in these islands are wedded to good governance," and have a "devotion to the rock but not necessarily to the government."

#### UN Voting Record

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17. (C) When the Ambassador reiterated USG appreciation for SVG casting the deciding vote in December's UNGA human rights resolution on Iran, Gonsalves admitted, "we have not been consistent in the past in voting on these matters." He followed this surprising admission by blaming SVG's former Ambassador to the United Nations, Margaret Hughes Ferrari (2001-2007) for previous UN votes on human rights, saying she was "cynical in her view that so-called Western nations used the human rights issue selectively." (Note: Gonsalves replaced Ferrari with his son Camillo Gonsalves in late 2007. End note).

#### Peace Corps Stabbing, Crime, and Medical Schools

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18. (C) The Ambassador then raised the recent dismissal of a criminal case against a Vincentian who had stabbed a Peace Corps Volunteer (PCV) in June 2007. According to USG representatives who attended the recent trial, the case against the perpetrator was withdrawn by the police prosecutor without calling all the witnesses, and despite overwhelming evidence that had been collected by local police. Saying "I am very sorry about this," Gonsalves promised to order investigations by the Police Chief, the Director of Public Prosecutions and the Attorney General into the handling of the case. Based on his knowledge of the legal system, the PM said that a retrial is very unlikely, given SVG's laws against "double jeopardy"; however, he noted that a civil suit was still possible.

19. (C) When the Ambassador expressed general concerns about the crime situation in SVG, Gonsalves downplayed any concerns, and in reference to the closure of Kingstown Medical College (Ref B), denied that crime was truly a deciding factor. Instead, he noted that the College had demanded "exclusivity" (a guarantee that it would be the only medical school with access to SVG's hospitals) while negotiating the renewal of its contract with the government. Gonsalves claimed that since the closure of the college,

school officials had since offered to open a four-year medical school on the site, but that the government had decided (but not yet announced) to go with an offer from a different institution to found a four-year medical school in St. Vincent. Recognizing the potential of so-called "educational tourism", Gonsalves noted that SVG was seeking additional medical schools that would be interested in attaching themselves to the medical center currently being built in the nation's second-largest city of Georgetown.

#### LIAT, Race, and Culture

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¶10. (C) When asked about recent claims in the Eastern Caribbean that the sole regional air carrier, LIAT, was inefficient and guilty of price-gouging, Gonsalves replied that (St. Lucia's Minister of Tourism) "Chastanet talks a lot of rubbish when it comes to regional air transport." Noting the lack of air transport regulation in the Eastern Caribbean, and in regards to governmental efforts to increase competition in the region, Gonsalves stated, "we've been down that road before", citing the failures of Carib Express, BWIA, and Caribbean Star, among others. Gonsalves said he was "not against competition" but wants "fair competition."

¶11. (C) He further criticized St. Lucia's Alan Chastanet as among "a species of brown people in the Caribbean with money" who are "not loyal to anybody". Gonsalves continued by noting that such people, whom he described as "Castries mulattos", believe they are "oracles" and represent a "break in the social advancement in the Eastern Caribbean."

¶12. (C) Continuing on the theme of culture, Gonsalves lamented the influence of "U.S. prison culture" on his country in the modes of dress adopted by young people. On a positive note, the Ambassador expressed her desire to provide cultural preservation funding to the GOSVG to refurbish wood panels depicting the indigenous Carib population that are currently housed in the dilapidated Fort Charlotte. Gonsalves expressed gratitude and promised to provide the appropriate contact so that such a project could proceed immediately.

#### Comment

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¶13. (C) While the friendly nature of the meeting reflected the Embassy's generally good relations with St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Gonsalves was at his legalistic best, downplaying both SVG's involvement in ALBA and the crime situation (which by most accounts has severely escalated of late). Still, he was extremely responsive to the Ambassador's concerns regarding the incident involving the Peace Corps volunteer, and was quick to offer extremely frank views on a variety of subjects. Gonsalves remains a master of contradictions, who continues to court whatever foreign government he can in order to secure financial and other benefits for his country. End Comment.

OURISMAN